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INQUIRY

Topic: THE CIA

William E. Colby, 64, was director of the Central Intelligence Agency in the 1970s. Born in Minnesota, he served in the U.S. Army during World War II, rising to major, and then joined the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA. He is the author of *Honorable Men — My Life in the CIA*. Colby was interviewed by free-lance journalist *Phil Moss*.



William E. Colby

Gathering intelligence means taking risks

USA TODAY: Do you think Iran was helping the hijackers who took the Kuwaiti jet to Tehran and murdered two Americans?

COLBY: It obviously had some relationship with the group that did the hijacking. But I don't think that group did it on Iran's orders or even with conspiracy. I think the Iranians were less than helpful in the way they handled it. They knew they had a basic sympathy with the people doing it, and they were slow to realize they had an obligation to straighten out the situation.

USA TODAY: Do you agree with Secretary of State George Shultz that the USA should launch pre-emptive strikes against terrorists, even if civilians might be harmed?

COLBY: Well, if I knew that somebody was cranking up a bomb and planned to move it

into the White House to blow it up, I would take such steps as I needed in order to stop that from happening. If that meant that I had to bomb something out of the air in order to do it, I would. The pieces of the plane would have to land some place. Somebody might get hurt. But I would protect the White House.

USA TODAY: What can be done to combat terrorism?

COLBY: One rule of terrorism is that if it gets serious, it gets suppressed. It usually gets suppressed through a combination of good intelligence, good security practices and public support because the terrorist becomes the enemy of the public. Then the public begins to help you to control it.

USA TODAY: As director of the Central Intelligence Agency, you had to be something of an expert on the Soviet Union. Can the Soviets be trusted at all?

COLBY: I have no trust in the Soviet Union. In 1962, the foreign minister of the Soviet Union (Andrei Gromyko), who is still the foreign minister, lied directly to President Kennedy when he assured him that he was not going to put any offensive nuclear missiles into Cuba. He said that at the very time he was doing it. I think we can watch the Soviet Union; we can tell through our own devices whether they will be complying with an agreement we reach between us or whether they'll be cheating on it.

USA TODAY: If we can't verify what weapons they have, is it worthwhile to reach any kind of arms agreement with them?

COLBY: It's not worthwhile if we can't verify it. But we can verify it. If you get into an arcane discussion of whether verification means you can identify the last quarter-inch of the fin of some missile, then you say no, it's not verifiable. But if you approach verification from what it really is, which is the protection of your country against strategic surprise, then you begin to realize that any kind of a strategic action on their side would be telegraphed years in advance, thanks to the intelligence technology we have with the satellites, the electronics, the acoustics. If you have any doubts, just look at what the Defense Department publishes about Soviet weapons.

USA TODAY: Are we ahead or behind the Soviets in arms?

COLBY: Both nations have the ability to retaliate absolutely against any use of nuclear weapons against them. We are ahead of the Russians in some weapons. They're ahead of us in some weapons, and the difference is inconsequential.

USA TODAY: Do you think President Reagan really wants an arms agreement?

COLBY: I think the president is quite resolved to achieve some kind of success in the arms control area. I think earlier he was very uninformed in it. But I think today he's resolved to achieve some results. I think he's taken exactly the right step of getting Paul Nitze to become the leading man to try to put together some kind of an agreement. I think the president's interest now is in the history books, rather than the next election.



By Susan Harlan, USA TODAY

USA TODAY: Before heading the CIA, you served in Vietnam. Why haven't we been able to account for all of our men who are missing in action?

COLBY: The North Vietnamese have been incredibly cynical in their use of the remains of our people killed over there, handing them out one at a time to visiting delegations. I think that our relations with the North Vietnamese are going to be very bad for a long time. Whether there are any Americans still living in Vietnam, I just don't know. I think they probably, in most cases, died of natural causes or unnatural causes, and the North Vietnamese are afraid to admit responsibility.

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